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CASE STUDY TWO:

The Role of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in Peace Building in Northern Uganda

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in Controlling Violent Conflicts and Building Peace**
A Study of Three Approaches in the Greater Horn of Africa

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Executive Summary

This is an evaluation of the nature, impact, and outcomes of the Acholi Religious Leader's Peace Initiative (ARLPI) on the search for peace and reconciliation in northern Uganda since 1997. The ARLPI is an interfaith collaborative framework of leaders of the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of Uganda, and Muslims in Gulu and Kitgum districts that has sought to influence and promote dialogue between the government and rebels of the Lord Resistance Army (LRA). Engaging local and international actors has allowed the ARLPI to use its organizational reach in Acholi society to advocate for a peaceful solution to the civil war and to pressure for comprehensive measures to socioeconomic problems facing northern Uganda. During the evaluation, I met and spoke with leaders of the ARLPI, national and local government officials, legislators, NGOs, and a cross-section of ordinary people who have been affected by the intervention.

The ARLPI's Track II intervention role embraces community activities that range from lobbying for amnesty for the rebels, educating the population about peace, and providing an alternative forum for the articulation of local grievances. Within a very short time, these activities have spawned new local institutions, primarily the Kitgum Joint Peace Forum (KJPT) and the Gulu District Peace and Reconciliation Team (DPRT). These institutions are a testimony to the ability and willingness of local people to contribute to peace. But the ARLPI's intervention and the institutions it has spawned are still new and untested, dependent for their long-term efficacy on comprehensive regional and national solutions to the civil conflict. Although it serves as an embryonic model of collaborative problem solving at the grassroots level, the ARLPI is still constrained by the ongoing civil war.

The Nature of the Conflict and Its Causes

The civil conflict in Acholiland pits the LRA led by Joseph Kony against the government of President Yoweri Museveni. It forms a significant part of the north-south divide that has dodged post-independence Ugandan politics. Almost twenty years of dominance of state power by northern rulers, Milton Obote, Idi Amin, and Tito Okello, ended in January 1986 with the triumph of southern elites under Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA). The shift in power to the south stemmed from the ouster of President Obote in July 1985 who had returned to power after contested elections in 1980. Following this election, Museveni's NRA launched a guerrilla war that weakened Obote's government. Tito Okello, an Acholi, became president after the coup of July 1985, but despite negotiations in Nairobi, Kenya, to end the civil war, the NRA overthrew Okello in 1986.

Museveni's victory led to a generalized sense of northern marginalization that has festered over the years. When the NRA captured Gulu and Kitgum, it dealt violently with local opposition forces, sowing the seeds of dissent. In August 1986, remnants of Okello's army, which had fled into southern Sudan, formed a movement, the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), and began an armed insurgency against the government in Acholiland. Furthermore, in this state of lawlessness, Alice Auma Lakwena formed a new rebel movement, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), that claimed inspiration from the Holy Spirit. The Lakwena movement initially enjoyed popular support among the beleaguered civilian population and posed a considerable threat to Museveni's consolidation of power in the north. After Lakwena's defeat in 1988, her cousin, Joseph Kony, adopted her quasi-religious dogma and continued the war. The UPDA continued as a separate movement, but in June 1988, responding to a government amnesty and peace gesture, its leaders signed a peace agreement with the government. Mediated by the then Catholic Bishop of Gulu, Cypriano Kihangire, the peace settlement culminated in the incorporation of UPDA leaders into the government.

With the dissolution of the UPDA, Kony's LRA guerrillas became the principal source of northern insurgency in Acholiland. In response the government launched a coordinated counterinsurgency in 1991, Operation North, which was highly criticized by human rights organizations for its brutality and heavy-handedness. During the operation, the government sealed off much of the north from the rest of the country and created "protected camps" to isolate civilians from the rebels. Although the operation dealt a severe blow to LRA activities, it marked a phase in the deterioration of relations between the government and the Acholi. In a reversal of strategy, the government through Betty Bigombe, an Acholi Minister in Charge of the North, embarked on negotiations with the LRA in 1994. Bigombe's efforts collapsed amidst government claims that the LRA lacked seriousness while the LRA charged that Museveni was committed to a military solution.

Following the collapse of the peace talks, the LRA resumed the war with the assistance of the Sudanese government. Since 1994 military, logistical, and financial support from

the Islamic government in Khartoum strengthened the LRA's operational capacity particularly in the face of declining local support for the rebellion. Devoid of popular support, the LRA resorted to abducting children and sending them for military training in camps in southern Sudan. Sudanese support invariably added a regional dimension to the northern Uganda conflict as Khartoum claimed to be retaliating against Museveni's support for the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), battling the end of domination of southern Sudan by the Muslim north. As both sides have acknowledged mutual support for the insurgencies, local actors attempting to fashion peaceful approaches have faced tremendous obstacles in dealing with the regional context.

The LRA rebellion has exploited the uneven economic development between the north and south. Perceptions about northern economic marginalization are heightened by the limited government investment in education, health, and communications throughout the two districts. Acholiland bears all the hallmarks of underdevelopment: the death rate in both districts is estimated at 53.7 persons per a 1000, female life expectancy is 44.2 years at birth and infant mortality rate is 165 per 1000 live births. The devastations of the dreaded Ebola virus in Gulu starting in September 2000 underscored the deplorable state of health services in the north. To address some of the grievances undergirding the rebellion, the government launched the first phase of the Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program (NURP) in 1992 focusing on investment in education, water, telecommunications, and agriculture. The NURP sought to restore the essential socioeconomic infrastructure destroyed by the civil war and bridge the disparity between the north and south. Despite the infusion of World Bank funding for phase one of NURP, continuing insurgency nullified the potential economic gains from the program. Since 1998, the government has embarked on preparation for the second phase of NURP.

The escalation of the civil war over the last 15 years has had enormous economic consequences on livelihoods. In particular, Gulu and Kitgum, once depended on cattle as a means of income and security have seen the marked decline of herds. In addition, with the deterioration of the security situation and the increase of number of people living in protected camps, food production has plummeted and deepened the dependence on relief aid. Apart from the devastation of the economy and infrastructure, the conflict has severely destroyed family structures. Widespread descriptions of Acholiland as a traumatized society underscore the magnitude of social dislocations the war has occasioned. The rebels have indiscriminately abducted and indoctrinated children, eroding the basic values of Acholi society. Since 1997, the rebels have abducted more than 14,000 children and kept them as soldiers, porters and sex slaves. At the same time the abduction of children and violence meted out against defenseless civilians forced the government to step up the program of protected camps that has affected almost 400,000, about half of the population of Gulu and Kitgum. But although the government was responding to the rebel challenge, the implementation of the policy of protected camps has generated considerable resentment in the region, especially since the camps have inadequate facilities, and for the most part, do not prevent rebel attacks.

Nature of the Intervention

The core actors in the ARLPI's inter-faith initiative are Anglican Bishop of Northern Uganda, Rev. Nelson Onono-Onweng, Catholic Archbishop of the Gulu Diocese, Most Rev. John Baptist Odama, the Anglican Bishop of Kitgum Diocese, Rev. Macleod Baker Ochola, the Muslim Chief Kadhi of Kitgum, Sheikh Suleiman Wadriff, and Muslim Chief Kadhi of Gulu, Sheikh Musa Khalil. Their intervention sought to draw from their moral and religious power, neutrality, and extensive organizational anchor of churches, parishes, and mosques. By most estimates 90 per cent of the Acholi belong to one of the three religious faiths, furnishing the leadership with strategic institutional networks to mobilize for peace and reconciliation.

Attempts to bring together the three major religions under the umbrella of the ARLPI are a departure from the legacy of religious polarization and partisanship. Like the rest of the country, the north inherited a pattern of close institutional affiliation between religious groups and political parties, notably the association of the Catholics with the Democratic Party (DP) and the Anglicans with the Uganda People's Congress (UPC). This sectarianism was exacerbated by Idi Amin's efforts to promote Islam as the dominant religion throughout the 1970s. Although Museveni launched a campaign against sectarianism starting in 1986, these divisions remained salient to political life. By transcending the inherited institutional divisions, the ARLPI views its organizational framework as a major phase in anti-sectarianism, not just in the north, but the rest of country.

The ARLPI's intervention sought to break the institutional and leadership impasse over the conflict. Except for the abortive peace talks conducted by Betty Bigombe, the Museveni government had been committed to use force to end the rebellion. The LRA's inchoate objectives, its brutality, and links to the Sudan government strengthened the government's pursuit of a military solution. At the height of militarization of the conflict, 1995-1997, there was a steady deterioration in the relationships between the civilians and the military in Acholiland, and between Acholiland elected leaders and the central government in general. This deterioration was inextricably linked to widespread claims of military heavy-handedness in dealing with the insurgency and the local people's perception that the government was not doing enough to confront some of the grievances behind the rebellion. Furthermore, in March 1997, a government-controlled parliamentary committee on defense and internal security voted to escalate the military campaign against the LRA.

The leadership vacuum was heightened by the fragmentation within the Acholi community that prevented a consistent voice that would articulate and aggregate the collective demands. Although the government had made efforts to incorporate segments of the Acholi in the NRM structures, in light of the history of north-south mistrust, there was a perception that these leaders were compromised. Moreover, as the NRM gradually allowed the resumption of political activities, a deep gulf emerged between Acholi elected members of parliament (MPs) and government ministers and

local state agencies. In the absence of clear leadership, the ARLPI seemed ready to fill the vacuum as a locus of community leadership and a bridge-builder between the Acholi and central government.

In the broad mandate as a bridge-builders coalescing around a crisis that had resonance to the community, the ARLPI intervention focused on short -and long- term objectives. In the short-term, the initiative sought to mobilize local and national leaders, the Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international community to find a mediated solution to the rebellion. Through these collaborative efforts, the religious leaders would provide the leadership that would forge the community consensus to promote and coordinate efforts for reconciliation and help to foster a culture of dialogue. The ARLPI saw the ending of the civil strife as the essential precondition for the long-term of objectives that encompassed the comprehensive mobilization of resources to deal with the multiple problems of post-conflict reconstruction, social justice, and economic development to redress the marginalization of the north.

Preliminary discussions to foster common approaches to peace began in Kitgum between June and August 1997 organized by Anglican and Catholic leaders. These efforts culminated in joint prayer for peace by Christians and Muslims on August 15 under a new organization, the Joint Justice and Peace. This organization issued a message that proposed peaceful approaches to the war and condemned the government's policy of establishing protected camps. By January 1998, these initiatives spread to Gulu, resulting in a joint meeting of religious leaders from both districts. To provide organizational framework to the initiative, the religious leaders appointed Bishop Onon-Onweng as the coordinator who would liaise with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and other donors for funding of peace initiatives. The ARLPI formally constituted itself in February 1998 by appointing a five-member task force to oversee its functions.

A decisive breakthrough for the ARLPI was a meeting with President Museveni on March 8, 1998, in which the leaders presented a memorandum, **A Call for Peace and an End to Bloodshed in Acholiland** that marked the formal inauguration of the intervention. Its immediate objective was to contribute to the process of establishing peace and stability in Acholiland through effective mediation, consensus building, participatory involvement of all the parties, and cessation of hostilities. In engaging the Museveni government, the ARLPI's point of departure was forgiveness and reconciliation, the centerpiece of the campaign for peaceful approach to the conflict. Key actors in the ARLPI claim that a reluctant Museveni was forced to concede the message of reconciliation when they reminded him that even God forgives sinners. They also credit Museveni for acknowledging the concerns of the ARLPI, marking a significant departure from the past practice of militarism. Presidential imprimatur to the intervention was a critical first step in building confidence and acknowledgement of the centrality of alternative institutional avenues for engagement. More important, national recognition bolstered the ARLPI's position in the eyes of local government actors, in

particular the Local Councils and military authorities, which were to become partners in the peace initiatives.

Legitimized at both the national and local levels, the ARLPI through funding from the UNDP embarked on a series of activities to promote peace. The UNDP's Director in Uganda, Babatunde Thomas, was major player in the formative stages of coordination of funding for the ARLPI. As part of the agreement with the UNDP, the ARLPI obtained annual funds for its activities disbursed over three-months periods. These funds were targeted specifically to holding workshops, meetings, and travel to establish contacts with the LRA and its allies.

In June 1998, the ARLPI organized a three-day consultative meeting, **Bedo Piny**, in Gulu under the theme of Active Community Participation in Healing, Restoration, and Development. This meeting brought together a broad spectrum of leaders from government, parliamentarians, military, and NGOs to focus on practical approaches to ending the war and reflect on future strategies to meet the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment. Building on the momentum generated by the meeting with the president, the meeting sought to commit the government and Acholi leadership to a sustained peace initiative that would depart from the previous erratic efforts. This meeting was innovative because it constituted a soul-searching reflection on the diagnosis and prescriptions of the civil conflict. The ARLPI structured the discussions around four central themes: the causes of the insurgency; the causes of its persistence; impact on Acholiland; and measures all parties needed to take to address its end.

On the genesis of the conflict, the meeting gave participants the opportunity for an open debate on the NRM's role in alienating the Acholi through its initial policy of impunity, destruction of civilian property, and the vilification of the Acholi. There was, however, acknowledgement a large part of the animosity stemmed from a leadership vacuum among the Acholi, a vacuum that had been filled inadvertently by the rebels. On the continuation of the war, discussion focused on the linkage between the government's support of the SPLA and Sudan's continued destabilization of Acholiland through reciprocal support for the LRA. A major criticism of the military efforts expended on the war effort highlighted the low morale of the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and inadequate commitment of resources to end the insurgency. Most participants also criticized the government for its failure to listen to local community's view about ways to resolve the conflict.

The **Bedo Piny** proposed a number of recommendations: there was no military solution to the insurgency; efforts should be made to bring the LRA and the government to the negotiating table; an olive branch should be extended to the Joseph Kony and his combatants; parliament should enact an Amnesty Law to pave the way for dialogue and reconciliation; efforts should be made to win the hearts and minds of people in the areas of insurgency; Uganda and Sudan should begin negotiations to resume diplomatic relations; religious leaders, Acholi MPs, NGOs and all other social forces should continue to exert pressure on the government and rebels to listen to the concerns of the people; and religious leaders should begin a massive program of

sensitization to promote awareness of the benefits of peace. The consultative meeting also gave a mandate to the ARLPI to engage the United Nations system and other foreign donors in the quest for a comprehensive and lasting solution to the northern insurgency.

The June consultative forum established the legitimacy of the ARLPI as an essential interlocutor in the conflict, solidifying the gains accruing from Museveni's recognition of its role. In addition, the forum mandated the ARLPI to work with the Acholi in the Diaspora for the restoration of peace and stability. Comprising a motley of actors with different political persuasions, most of the Acholi in exile have had strained relations with the Museveni government. The history of mistrust between most of the exiles and the NRM had for long precluded meaningful dialogue on northern issues. The emergence of religious leaders as a force for peace and reconciliation presented an opportunity to reach out to the exiles constituted since 1997 as the **Kacoke Madit (KM)**, the convention of Acholi Diaspora. What has emerged is a reciprocal relationship of mutual engagement between the KM and ARLPI. Conscious of its limits to influence events on the ground, the exiles have appreciated the importance of drawing on local partners to help in forging new approaches to the plight of Acholiland. For its part, the ARLPI has engaged the exiles because of the resource scarcity and the imperative of borrowing power from the wider international community. Tapping into the economic and political resources of the exiles has allowed the ARLPI to deligitimize external supporters of the LRA in exile by sensitizing them about the scale of the rebel atrocities. Local participants describe the London meeting as an eye-opener to the LRA's external supporters particularly in listening to accounts of atrocities against children. In starting a dialogue about the multifaceted problems of the north, this collaborative relationship has laid the foundation for common approaches to long-term goals of rehabilitation and reconstruction. Furthermore in establishing links with the Acholi exiles, the ARLPI has given the government an entry point into a critical Acholi constituency.

To underscore this growing relationship, the ARLPI sent a delegation of eight people to participate in the KM conference in London in July 1998 to present the recommendations of the **Bedo Piny** and solicit complementary support from the Acholi in the diaspora. This meeting recommended that the LRA and government enter into a cease-fire as a preliminary step to a dialogue facilitated by a third party; appealed to the LRA to stop abductions, killings, and destruction of property; urged the Uganda parliament to rescind the March 1997 regarding the use of military force to resolve the conflict; called upon all the Acholi to promote peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and called upon the government to normalize relations with Sudan.

To provide continuity to the initiative and with the objective of creating new relationships, the ARLPI organized a high-level meeting with the Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), Local Council chairs, and MPs from both districts in September 1998 under the theme of "Come Let's Rebuild." The meeting dealt at length with approaches to meeting human rights abuses and atrocities in conflict. It also gave the government, through the Minister in Charge on Northern Rehabilitation, a chance to reiterate the commitment to upholding the ongoing comprehensive dialogue on the civil

war. This meeting formally requested the ARLPI, as an impartial body, to spearhead the broad-based campaign of peace education and sensitization under the framework of Community Peace-Building Program. Its centerpiece was the conscious process of actively involving the community to effectively participate in healing, restoration, reconciliation, peace, and development.

Implementation of the Intervention

The Uganda Parliament passed an Amnesty Act in November 1999, reversing the previous resolution to use military force in dealing with the LRA. The Act was set in motion by President Museveni's indication in July 1998 that he would accept a ceasefire with the rebels. The ARLPI regards the passage of the Amnesty Act as its major contribution to the search for peace. Although the mobilization for the Amnesty Act was a collective effort including the Acholi Parliamentary Group (APG) and the KM, the specific contribution of the ARLPI was to advocate for a blanket amnesty on the premise of forgiveness and healing: "We have forgiven Kony, why not the government?" This question, which became the ARLPI's clarion call, lent credibility to the consistent yearning for reconciliation. The call for a comprehensive amnesty forced the hands of the government. The Amnesty Act reflects the consensus that despite the suffering, a blanket amnesty is the only means of delivering a settlement that would also restore the role of traditional institutions in reconciliation and healing for sustainable peace.

For the ARLPI, the Amnesty Act defines their moment of triumph, beginning subsequent bids to expand its institutional roles, sharpen its focus, and build new alliances and institutions. The phase beyond the Amnesty is also a test case for intra-organizational unity and sense purpose in the face of grappling with the intermediate objectives of building peace across the community. Consistent with mandate accorded to it by the September 1998 meeting, the ARLPI embarked on systematic advocacy for peace through sensitization campaigns conducted at all levels of society. These campaigns have utilized existing religious structures of propagation and dissemination within the ARLPI framework, particularly the places of worship. Some of the campaigns have involved joint meetings, but individual institutions have conducted most of them. The Catholic Church, whose central Archdiocese in Gulu covers both districts, for instance, uses the parish priests as the vehicles for the dissemination of peace. The Anglican Church, a much more decentralized institutions, employs the bishops at the county and sub-county levels. Although a minority in Acholiland, Muslims in Gulu and Kitgum have rallied their adherents through the mosques.

A key component of the sensitization campaign has been the training of Volunteer Peace Animators (VPAs), local actors at the forefront of the peace-building program. This program began in March 1999 with training in various sub-counties under the guidance and supervision of the local religious leaders, working closely with the local council leaders (LCIII), and NGOs. Their roles include: promotion of the understanding, implementation, and consequences of the Amnesty Law as an instrument of reconciliation and building peace; facilitation of participatory dialogue on issues of conflict and peace; catalysts for non-violence, peace, and reconciliation; organization of community peace workshops; linking the "community peace-building" program activities with the sub-county chiefs and LCIII program, as well as other efforts and organizations working in the promotion of justice, human rights, reconciliation, and community development.

By August 2000, the ARLPI had trained 60 VPAs, corresponding to the sub-counties in Gulu and Kitgum. The VPAs have, in turn, formed the bedrock for sub-county peace committees, groups of people from local communities who come together frequently to: resolve specific conflicts between individuals and groups; help communities to discover root causes of conflicts and develop strategies to avoid violent conflicts; foster improved gender relations; promote collaborative action in peace building. The training component of the program has been funded almost exclusively by the Mennonite Central Committee, which became engaged in the ARLPI's activities in January 1999. The Mennonites have ensured that the proper training for the VPAs; organized seminars for the staff of the ARLPI on basic approaches to conflict resolution at community levels; sponsored an ARLPI program director to a summer program at the Eastern Mennonite College, Virginia, and another one at a Mennonite college in Mindolo, Zambia. As major actors in the training program, the Mennonites as a sister faith-based organization have helped boost the capacity of the peace campaigns. Without their assistance, the successes garnered to date may not have occurred.

Although the training program is important in enhancing the ability of the ARLPI to sustain its initiatives, it faces the challenge stemming from limited resources and understaffing. With one program director in Gulu, an assistant in Kitgum, and three office workers, the ARLPI operates on a shoestring budget. Since September 2000, the UNDP stopped funding the ARLPI's activities, leading to a frantic search for new sources of assistance. In the fall 2000, the ARLPI submitted a \$336, 0000 proposal to donors seeking to expand the training and peace building programs under the rubric of "capacity building and relationship building." At the completion of its wide-ranging activities in 2003, the proposal envisages establishing permanent leadership and peace-building training program; empowering religious leaders; training 2 VPAs in each sub-county; and integrating peace-building activities in youth and women's programs.

Training for peace has been accompanied by the ARLPI's assumption of an advocacy role on questions of human rights violations and justice. As some of the rebels and abducted children responded to the government amnesty, the ARLPI became a buffer between them and state authorities. Advocacy has forced the ARLPI to deliberately engage the local officials and, at times, petitioning of the president and other national leaders, on security questions. For instance, most of the petitions to local officials in 1999 and 2000 dealt with concerns about the military's mistreatment of returning rebels and children. Furthermore, as the security situation deteriorated following systematic attacks of Acholi by Karamajong cattle rustlers in early 2000, the ARLPI sent memorandum to government officials warning of the dangers of arming civilians and the alleged collaboration of some security officials with the Karamajong raiders.

In another landmark meeting to publicize its role while building new alliances, the ARLPI jointly organized a forum on Peace Research and Reconciliation Agenda with a local NGO, the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD) in September 1999. Funded by Christian AID, the forum invited religious leaders from

conflict-ridden regions in Karamoja, Teso, Lango, and West Nile to showcase the ARLPI's ecumenical experiment.

Following the September 1999 meeting, three of the ARLPI's leaders made a visit to the U.S. under the sponsorship of the Episcopal Church of Washington D.C. In meetings with a cross-section of government, members of congress, and U.N. officials, they mobilized international attention on four themes: the release of the estimated 14,000 abducted children; strengthening the Amnesty Law so that it should have in-built mechanisms for demobilization and monitoring compliance by all the major players; dialogue and reconciliation between Sudan and Uganda; international support for resettlement, reconstruction; and development. The ARLPI leadership views the U.S. trip as a decisive event in raising their international visibility. In other efforts to build regional ties, the ARLPI has reached out to religious leaders from southern Sudan in an attempt to share experiences, promote dialogue, and explore opportunities for building working relationships across the border the ARLPI. A mid-September 2000 between the ARLPI and Sudanese religious groups aborted because of the outbreak of the Ebola virus in Gulu.

Impact of the Intervention

Government responsiveness to the ARLPI was instrumental in jumpstarting the peace initiatives, laying the background for a working relationship between the central government and local actors. At the national level, there has been a marked improvement in the discourse about the north, which previously castigated all Acholi for the insurgency. During a visit to Gulu in June 2000, President Museveni apologized for the continued insecurity in the region and vowed to devote more resources on security and development in the north: “I am sorry about the continuing problems of insecurity... I have completely subdued my anger on Kony with his LRA soldiers in the interest of Ugandans and signed the Amnesty Bill, which is already in place now for all the rebel groups still fighting the Government of Uganda. So let us see whether the Bill will work to restore an everlasting peace in this country.” Regular presidential visits have also gone a long way toward overcoming the previous stance that the northern problem was essentially an Acholi problem.

The Minister of State for Northern Uganda Rehabilitation has also acknowledged that the intervention has altered the overall behavior of the government and its organs, including the military and security forces in their relations with society as a whole. The sustained attention toward the peace process has, in turn, began to significantly reduce the perception of government marginalization of the north and the siege mentality that had characterized the Acholi community. Part of the attitudinal change has been the incorporation of local level peace-building and conflict resolution in the second phase of the NURP. The overall objective of the new program is “support a comprehensive war to peace transition process through various methods in a region affected by conflict and chronic underdevelopment while maintaining the pace set by NURP I.”

Central government responsiveness has forced the local institutions such as the LCs, the Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), and the military to recognize the essential contribution of ARLPI to the peace process. In the context of 15 years of animosity, and the ongoing civil war, the improvement in the working relationships between civilian and military leaders in Acholiland cannot be underestimated. Dialogue, born of appreciation of the comparative institutional advantage, is a major behavioral change flowing from the intervention of the ARLPI.

The most important institutions created in the post-Amnesty period are the Kitgum Joint Peace Forum (KJFP), and the District Reconciliation and Peace Team (DRPT) in Gulu, whose goal is to spearhead joint peace initiatives. Both bodies comprise the following actors: the ARLPI, the RDC, LCV chairs, NGOs, the military, and traditional leaders. In Gulu, the LCV chairman chairs DRPT while the KJFP is chaired by the RDC. Although created to disseminate information about the Amnesty Act, these institutions have become the forum for broader discussions about security in the two districts. Where previously local institutions talked past each other, now they can share information and plan joint approaches to collective concerns. Since they were formed, these institutions have addressed issues such as: organizing peace campaigns,

reintegrating former rebels into society, reuniting abducted children with their parents and relatives, and reaching consensus on broader policy goals for post-conflict reconstruction. Some of the religious leaders, citing the necessity of autonomous institutions, have complained about the leadership structures of the DRPT and KJFP, in particular the dominant roles of the RDCs and LCs. Yet these criticisms have, so far, not impaired their participation in these institutions.

Independently, leaders of the ARLPI have initiated negotiations with some of the rebels. This has been important in creating confidence and opening alternative avenues of negotiations. In April 2000, for instance, a breakaway faction of the LRA asked for pardon and requested ARLPI to reconcile them with the government. Its leader claimed that 800 former rebels based in Kenya were ready to be repatriated to Uganda if the ARLPI would provide guarantees of safety. There is also one publicized case of a rebel commander surrendering to ARLPI in Gulu. Consequently, some of the returning rebels have felt more secure surrendering to the ARLPI than the army. Independent initiatives toward the rebels are still new, and while the government has indicated that the ARLPI has a blanket authorization to enter into dialogue with the rebels, some of the local government leaders, particularly in Kitgum, seem uncomfortable with such initiatives.

Acholi institutions such as the KJPF and DRPT constitute the fulcrum for the national Amnesty Commission, which was created by parliament to implement the Amnesty Act. The functions of the Commission are: to implement the Amnesty Act; monitor the demobilization, reintegration, and resettlement of returnees; coordinate the sensitization process of the Amnesty; and promote appropriate reconciliation mechanisms. Since it took long for parliament to authorize funding for the Commission, the Commissioners revealed that they would draw most of the implementation blueprint from lessons learnt in Acholiland. They also noted that they were contemplating replicating Acholi institutions in other parts of the country where the Amnesty Act applies.

USAID and the Belgian governments have funded the peace campaigns of the DRPT and KJFP, reflecting their interest in peaceful approaches to the civil war. It also speaks to the recognition of the centrality of collective institutions in meeting the myriad challenges produced by the civil war. The Belgians have also funded the revival of Acholi traditional leaders through the anointment of chiefs. There is a consensus about the need to revitalize cultures and traditions which gave elders and clan leaders authority in fostering strong family units, parental care, harmony and reconciliation in the community. The role of traditional leaders is also central in the Amnesty process, as the returning rebels need to be cleansed through traditional practices. The ARLPI has invoked the compatibility of Acholi traditional beliefs with biblical injunctions to dramatize the synergy of institutional roles. Thus they have lobbied for the empowerment of traditional chiefs as complementary partners in building peace. In Gulu, for instance, the paramount chief, working alongside the ARLPI, played a role in the reconciliation between the Local Council leaders and members of parliament.

The Acholi parliamentary group (APG) is absent from the emerging district institutions. This absence is tied fundamentally to growing conflicts over roles and positions, which

stem from the ARLPI's institutionalization. The APG supported the ARLPI's initial objectives of finding ways to end the rebellion and promote reconciliation. From the perspective of the APG, these were manageable goals that coincided with the routine institutional mandate of religious leaders. Problems have arisen, however, because the APG is wary of the multiplication of the ARLPI's roles as it wades into the uncharted waters of development and reconstruction. Over time, the APG perceives the religious leaders as potential source of competition and diminution of its legitimate role as the people's voice. The criticisms made against the ARLPI by the APG members is that the religious leaders began with good intentions to end the war, but have now gradually "politicized" the organization and become an institution on the lines of an NGO. In addition, they claimed that the ARLPI wants to usurp their positions as genuine leaders: "why should we be invited by religious leaders to peace meetings, we are the people's representatives?"

Growing institutional tensions might reflect turf battles that are inevitable in the teething phases of articulating new roles and positions. Yet there are two dimensions to the institutional tensions that deserve attention. The first, inextricably tied to national politics, proceeds from the perception among some MPs that although the ARLPI has evolved as alternative entry point for the government to north, this has come about without significant alteration in the NRM's approach to the civil war or the wider problem of northern economic and political marginalization. With the polarization of national politics along the Movement and Multiparty-divide, Acholi MPs (most who are multiparty activists) have less trust for the NRM. They claim the government's peace overtures are half-hearted since the continuation of the war benefits army commanders. Moreover, they contend, the NRM prefers the status quo because then it can use the war to justify the continuance of the Movement system. These criticisms have been extended to the donor-funded peace mobilization campaigns led by KJPF and DRPT which the MPs claim target people who might have relatively little control over the rebels, reinforce collective guilt of the Acholi, and have a narrow focus. These campaigns, they contend, are opportunities for local leaders to use donor funds for personal ends.

The second dimension has a local flavor and is tied to intra-Acholi leadership feuds. It stems from the APG's concerns about its leadership position being usurped. There is also fear by some MPs that in the long term the ARLPI might become launching pads for political careers. This view finds articulation in the claim that the religious leaders would be more effective using their existing institutions rather than creating new umbrella ones such as the ARLPI. This aspect of the conflict is equally bound to have implications for donor funding since some in the APG attribute the ARLPI's institutional evolution to donor resources. Hence they criticize the ARLPI for mobilizing donor funding by charging that these efforts overstep the "original modest, but well-intentioned priority of peace." Similar criticisms are made of the role of donors in the anointment of traditional chiefs, a process that critics deride as misguided since the traditional leaders might not to be effective in the modern context of war and cultural change.

As the ARLPI has broadened its limited mandate from peace and reconciliation into a more institutional role, it has increasingly begun to look like a permanent pressure

group serving as the eyes and conscience of the local community. From its new year's messages exhorting against alcoholism and laziness to petitions to local authorities about human rights violations, the ARLPI has demonstrated its growing clout over a wide array of issues affecting the community. In the pastoral message of January 2000, for instance, the ARLPI used the occasion to denounce the alleged practice by military authorities of conscripting former abducted children into the Local Defense Units (LDUs), charging that these "children need to recover from past experiences. They should be completely demobilized and demilitarized."

The ARLPI acknowledges that it has not been effective with respect to the pressing issue of protected camps. As early as October 1997, the ARLPI published a statement against the protected camps policy because it was initially forced on the people and since these camps breed diseases and foster economic dependency. Subsequently, individual leaders have continued to oppose it. But there is not much the ARLPI can do in the face of escalating rebel attacks. In addition to fears about alienating local authorities and the central government, critical partners in the peace initiative, the ARLPI confronts the dilemma of proposing viable alternatives to the protected camps, particularly when people returning to their homes become more vulnerable to rebel attacks.

Contextual and Situational Conditions

The problems posed by the institutionalization of the ARLPI belie the real obstacles to restoring peace and stability in Gulu and Kitgum. The new actors and processes that have been in place since 1997 have introduced a dynamic that marginalizes military approaches to the conflict, yet their future viability is depended, for the most part, on generating some visible successes on the security front. Although the Amnesty Act was a momentous government concession designed to attract the rebels out of the bush, few rebels have responded positively to it. In Gulu, since 40 rebels surrendered in response to the Amnesty in December 1999 there have been few rebel returnees. Instead, the Amnesty has been largely an avenue for abducted children to return to their homes. Some local officials believe that more rebels would surrender once the government's Amnesty Commission establishes the economic packages of resettlement and demobilization. But Kony repudiated the Amnesty in February 2000, telling his fighters to burn all copies of the amnesty law and kill all government agents and collaborators. As a result, the increasing insecurity, rebel abductions of children, and the closure of the main transport arteries in the region remains a major challenge to the religious leaders as they grapple with issues of peace building.

Part of the lukewarm response to the Amnesty by the rebels results from the history of mistrust. While the ARLPI has tried to allay the fear of returning about retribution, there are past publicized cases of the disappearance of returnees. More recently, widespread reports of the army inducting former abducted children into its structures do not often help the sell the Amnesty. Kony, the prize target of the amnesty, sees it as an asymmetrical instrument in the hands of a government that has not met most of his demands.

In attempts to deal with the regional dimensions of the conflict, Uganda and Sudan engaged in negotiations in Nairobi under the mediation of the Carter Center. In December 1999, they signed a peace agreement in which they agreed to renounce the use of force to resolve differences and to stop aiding or condoning rebel activities based in either country. Although the agreement presented an opportunity for the parties to find a solution to the conflict between the LRA and the government, both sides were not entirely committed to it. Besides, the LRA did not participate in the talks and Kony promptly denounced the accord. Following the signing of the agreement, a new LRA incursion in Gulu and Kitgum shattered a period of relative peace and stability. Local leaders claim that these rebels are responsible for the ongoing mayhem in the region, including the murder of Kitgum's RDC in July 2000 and a spate of new abductions.

The ARLPI has consistently held the position the Uganda government ought to resume diplomatic relations with Sudan and both the SPLA and the LRA need to be represented at the negotiating table for a comprehensive solution to the problem of the north. Frustrated at being sidelined in bilateral negotiations, the ARLPI has urged for a more substantive role in the efforts by the Carter Center to revive the Sudan-Uganda

negotiations. It is yet to be determined whether the Uganda government would countenance to inclusion of the LRA and SPLA in bilateral negotiations Khartoum. Religious leaders are demanding a voice in the macro-political context of the conflict, a role that the government might be less willing to concede. Should the ARLPI win a place at the negotiating table on bilateral questions, this might be a good measure of the expanding power of religious leaders.

Lessons Learned and Conclusions

The ARLPI is an innovative experiment in cross-confessional mobilization defying the history of sectarianism in the north and Uganda in general. As an experiment in inter-faith collaboration, it has thus far effectively used its ecumenical pedestal to agitate for a peaceful approach to the civil conflict. The ARLPI's experience of religious collaboration around an issue-area is now the standard model observers prescribe to other crisis-ridden regions such as Karamoja, Langi, and Western Uganda. Track II local efforts have a dual-face: their autonomous origin is critical in sustaining their credibility, yet they cannot endure without a supportive central government. In conflicts such as Acholiland, the central government is important in tying the hands of local recalcitrant officials who may be less receptive to alternative approaches to conflict resolution. Local state actors need direction from central government to appreciate the contributions of middle level actors such as the ARLPI. But when such actors participate in creating new institutions with government actors, they risk compromising their autonomy.

The ambiguous relationship between Track II actors and state officials is inevitable in light of the complementary roles spawned by the challenges of seeking outcomes to civil conflicts. The religious leaders and their allies have shamed the government into doing things that it might not necessarily want, but such efforts need to be sustained by responsive national and local contexts. Autonomy is, therefore, not a zero-sum phenomenon since Track II efforts ultimately operate within the opportunities and constraints of larger political contexts. Realistically, local peace-building efforts are aptly perceived as complementary, rather than competitive to national and regional initiatives.

Middle level community track II efforts work better when they focus on narrow issue-areas such as peace and reconciliation, which generate broad consensus and are easy to mobilize opinion around. The question of focus is tied to one of role multiplication that generates the need for institutionalization. The dilemma, however, is that even focusing on narrow issues requires a modicum of institution building, which the ARLPI has had to do. As these roles multiply, local actors are forced to create more elaborate organizational structures. This explains the emergence of institutional conflicts, as the ARLPI takes on a life larger than what some of its supporters envisaged.

Perhaps one way out of the problem of role multiplication and institutionalization is for such organizations to articulate clearly their missions from the outset. For faith-based institutions in conflicts, it is also critical to define their relations with other existing institutions. The long-term mission of the ARLPI has yet to be effectively articulated to the lower rungs of the religious hierarchy, creating the impression at present, that the initiative is led and driven by few individuals. Potential intra-organizational problems might arise without a conscious attempt to define its future vis-à-vis its targets and constituencies.

Long-term efficacy of such track II efforts is depended on addressing the broader causes and sources of the civil conflict. In the face of continuing conflict, the ARLPI role needs to be seen more realistically as essential halfway house between national and regional initiatives. The persistent question the ARLPI obtains from the people in Acholiland is: Where is the Peace? It underscores the dilemma of advocating for a peace that seems to lie with parties beyond the reach of local actors. Religious leaders will be even more pertinent in the post-conflict reconstruction phase as they purvey the message of healing and reconciliation to a traumatized society

The ARLPI's core activities, education and training of PVAs, plus peace advocacy, need increased and consistent funding. Funding that strengthens the institutional capacity of the ARLPI is necessary to meet its growing roles and to build a lean, competent, and professional organization to oversee the work already in progress. There is also need for a better coordination of the ARLPI's roles with national religious organizations. In addition, institutionalization of the ARLPI needs to be accompanied by more transparency and accountability.

Funding of activities auxiliary to the institutional mission of the ARLPI such as the peace campaigns is bound to compromise the core activities of the ARLPI, reduce its institutional credibility and hamper future mobilization efforts. Peace campaigns epitomize the ARLPI's institutional outreach and collaboration, but they might dent its image, particularly when donor funds are not spent appropriately. The proliferation of proposals for donor funding for peace efforts that replicate the ARLPI's roles represents a troubling spiral of competitive bidding, particularly since most of the proposals are from organizations with tenuous links to the community or the major actors in the conflict.

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Persons Interviewed

1. Omwony Ojwok, Minister of State for Northern Reconstruction
2. Justice P. K. Onega, Chairman, Amnesty Commission
3. Hajj Burhani Miro, Member, Amnesty Commission
4. J. J. Otim, Presidential Agricultural Adviser
5. John J. Oloya, Rural Development Specialist, The World Bank, Kampala
6. Betty Oyella Bigombe, Social Scientist, The World Bank, Washington D.C.
7. Ronald Reagan Okumu, MP Aswa County, Gulu
8. Robert Mao, MP Gulu Municipality
9. John Okello-Okello, MP Chua County, Kitgum
10. Rt. Rev. Nelson Onono-Onweng, Coordinator, ARLPI, Northern Uganda Diocese
11. Rt. Rev. MacLeod Baker Ocholla, Bishop of Kitgum Diocese
12. John Okello, Kitgum Diocese
13. Imam Musa Khalil, Acting District Khadi, Gulu
14. Shafi Suleiman Ndehia, Deputy District Khadi, Kitgum
15. Msgr. Mathew Odongo, Vicar General, Gulu Archdiocese
16. Father Josef Gerner, Kitgum Catholic Mission
17. Father Mario Castro, Kitgum Catholic Mission
18. Lt. Col. George Magara, UPDF Spokesman, Gulu Barracks
19. Lt. Col. Walter Ochora, Local Council-V Chairman, Gulu
20. Geoffrey Okello, Deputy Resident District Commissioner, Gulu
21. John Bosco Oryem, Local Council-V Chairman, Kitgum
22. Sylvester Opira, Deputy Resident District Commissioner, Kitgum
23. Lam Oryem Cosmas, ARLPI Secretariat, Gulu

24. Ambrose Olaa, Community Development Officer, Kitgum
25. Martin Ayielar, Kitgum Children Watch
26. Geoffrey Okoth, Project Manager, Oxfam, Kitgum
27. Jeanine Anan, AVSI (Italian International Voluntary Aid Association), Kitgum
28. Jimmy Oyella George, AVSI, Kitgum
29. Mokvach Williams, AVSI, Kitgum
30. Farida Khawaja, AVSI, Kitgum
31. John Oputtu, The Monitor Correspondent, Gulu
32. Odongo Kara, Headmaster Kitgum Primary School
33. Andrew P. K. Obol, CARITAS, Kitgum
34. Paramount Chief David Ochan II, Gulu
35. Paramount Chief William Lugai, Kitgum
36. John E. Odoki-Obol II, Assistant chief
37. Rwot Justine Acan, Assistant Chief
38. Arop Poppy Paul, local elder
39. Augustine Olara, local elder
40. Esther Mego, local elder
41. Oywak Ywakamoi, local elder